The Apostle, the Philosopher, and Friar Thomas

The Place of Aristotle in Thomas Aquinas’s Dominican Vocation

Introduction

What is the relationship between Christian faith and philosophy? Can there be such a thing as a “Christian philosophy,” or is philosophy by its nature independent of faith? This question of fides et ratio is at the heart of current debates. For example, what role does Christian doctrine play in public policy: is there a Christian politics, a Christian economics, a Christian political philosophy?¹ In the other direction, what role does philosophy play in Christian formation and theology: can non-Christian philosophy help us understand our faith?

These are not easy questions to answer. The teachings of the Second Vatican Council, Pope St. John Paul II, and Pope Benedict XVI all involve answers to the Christian philosophy question. But before Vatican II, the question was the subject of a fierce debate among great Catholic thinkers in France in the 1930s.² A recent book, Gregory Sadler’s Reason Fulfilled by Revelation: The 1930s Christian Philosophy Debates in France, collects the various positions of the debate—and shows us how complicated it was. These philosophers were think-
ing both about their current situation and about St. Thomas Aquinas. How did he see the relationship between faith and philosophy? How should we?

The positions in the 1930s were subtle and difficult. Some said faith “generates” a new philosophy by providing concepts it would never find on its own: before the Bible taught about Creation, there was little philosophical reflection on existence. But others, generating new philosophical concepts, say reason works without faith, but faith gives it a new context, a new set of questions, a Christian “state.”

And a third answer takes a radically opposite position to the first, arguing that “Christian philosophy” is a contradiction in terms: reason is reason, philosophy is philosophy, whether Christian or not. One author even said, “Medieval philosophy has nearly always suffered from its too close contact with theology,” and, “Today still, many Catholic philosophers, deformed by theology, do not succeed in imposing on themselves a strictly philosophical method.” All three of these positions, and many more subtle ones, make good points.

The 1930s debate tried to answer the question for today by looking back to St. Thomas Aquinas. This article will do the same thing. But in light of eighty years of further historical scholarship, this essay will examine the question of Christian philosophy from a different angle: in light of his Dominican vocation. I will first examine Thomas’s choice of his vocation; then the intellectual demands of that vocation, both as the Order understood them and as Thomas did; and I shall thus reexamine his use of Aristotle. We shall find, on one hand, that Thomas uses Aristotle only in the service of biblical theology; and on the other hand, that it is important to Thomas that his philosophical servant be the non-Christian Aristotle.

Approaching from the angle of Thomas’s Dominican vocation gives us a more personal approach to the question of Christian philosophy. First, this approach will yield an answer more in line with the moderate or even anti-Christian-philosophy authors of the 1930s. Second, by approaching the question historically rather than abstractly, through personal vocation rather than pure reason, we
can take the polemical edge off the discussion. We can see how different vocations might approach the Christian-philosophy question differently, and we can find a more concrete way to think through the implications of our answers.

Part One: Friar Thomas

His Love of Aristotle

*Causa finalis aliarum causarum causa.* Though many fine works have examined Thomas’s particular use of sources, here my aim is to establish his goal. What was Thomas trying to accomplish?

A first datum in establishing Thomas’s goal is his fervent dedication to writing commentaries on Aristotle. These include not only logical works (the *Peryermenias* and the *Posteriorum*), ethical works (the *Politics*, a commentary on and an index of the *Ethics*), and metaphysical works (the *Metaphysics*, the *Physics*, and the pseudo-Aristotelian *De causis*) but also scientific works. Some of these scientific works are obviously relevant to theology (the *De anima*), but some seem only marginally useful to that task (the *De sensu et sensato* and its second part, *De memoria et reminiscientia*), and some seem unrelated to theology (the *Meteorology*, *De caelo*, and perhaps in this category the *De generatione et corruptione*).

Though we shall have to question his exact purpose in commenting on these texts, we must first acknowledge that he gave meticulous care to the task—a scholarly care perhaps best exemplified by his determining that the *De causis* was not a work of Aristotle, but of Proclus. Whatever he was doing, he gave it great attention.

This is more remarkable, however, when one considers that except for the *De anima*, all of these texts were written in the last five years of his life, during his second Paris regency (1268–72) and in Naples (1272–73). In his magisterial biography, Jean-Pierre Torrell lists the many works of philosophy and theology Thomas wrote in this five-year period (including commentaries on Matthew, John, Romans, and the Psalms; the *secunda pars* and *tertia pars* of the *Summa*
theologiae, the Disputed Questions De malo, De virtutibus, and De unione Verbi incarnati, seven series of quodlibets, and fourteen opuscula) and comments, “If the historical probabilities—and sometimes the certainties—were not so strong, it would be not mere astonishment that this list would provide but sheer incredulity. It has been necessary, therefore, to ask and try to verify if this thing was materially possible and under what conditions.”

Thomas does in fact seem to have written all these works, but in one sense the workload seems not to have been materially possible. In his own magisterial biography, James Weisheipl proposes that the mystical experience that ended Thomas’s writing career on December 6, 1273, had a physical basis in “a stroke resulting in some brain damage” or some other “acute breakdown of his physical and emotional powers due to overwork.”9 Torrell is more cautious, but concludes, “Weisheipl’s thesis, which suggests an extreme physical and nervous fatigue, coupled with mystical experiences that marked his last year, may be the most plausible.”

Thomas not only made the enigmatic remark that all his work now seemed like straw, but also responded to a request that he write more by simply stating, “Reginald, I cannot.” After he made an unusual visit to his sister’s home at his request, she asked Reginald, “What is wrong with Friar Thomas? He is completely out of his senses and has scarcely spoken to me.” Others reported him being stupefactus (dazed) and Thomas said, “The only thing I want now is that as God has put an end to my writing, he may quickly end my life also.”

His life did end shortly thereafter, as the result of hitting his head against a tree. Fr. Weisheipl’s diagnosis seems reasonable: “a breakdown of his constitution after so many years of driving himself ceaselessly by the work he loved. . . . Clearly after this experience there was impaired speech and a loss of manual dexterity and gait.”

This biographical detail provides an important frame to Thomas’s commentaries on Aristotle. They were not done at leisure. Thomas seems to have literally worked himself to death writing, among other things, a line-by-line commentary on Aristotle’s Meteorology.
His Dominican Vocation: Alternatives

Yet if we look not to the end of his career but to the beginning, a second series of data stands in contrast with the first. Thomas’s most significant life choice must surely have been to join the Dominicans. Yet on examination, we will find that an improbable choice for someone so interested in studying Aristotle, Thomas had alternatives.

As a youth, Thomas seems to have made some kind of profession at Monte Cassino, cradle of the Benedictine order, about midway between Rome and Naples. Thomas’s parents planned for him to be abbot of that monastery; his eldest sister Marotta was in fact made abbess of the nearby Benedictine monastery at Capua. When he was in his mid-teens, the abbot and his parents agreed to send him to Monte Cassino’s house of studies at the Emperor Frederick II’s rising university in Naples. Many, perhaps most of the great scholars of the recent centuries had been abbots, among them Alcuin (appointed abbot by Charlemagne, another Emperor promoting studies), Hilduin, Rupert of Deutz, Anselm, Bernard, and Abelard. If Thomas wanted the intellectual life, he could have stayed with the Benedictines.

Frederick II’s Naples was an excellent place for the study of Aristotle. Michael Scot, one of the most important early translators of Aristotelian philosophy into Latin, Torrell says,

had launched into the business of translation on his own. . . . But Scot entered the Emperor’s service beginning in September 1220. . . . It is in part thanks to the translations he and his school made from Arabic and Greek that Sicily and southern Italy experienced an intense cultural life at the time. Aristotelian science, Arabic astronomy, and Greek medicine all were flourishing in Palermo, Salerno, and Naples.

In Naples, the Emperor was supporting the best Aristotle scholars in the Latin world.

Studying in Naples, says Torrell, “Thomas could have become familiar very early with Aristotle’s natural philosophy and metaphysics, at a time when studying them was still officially forbidden in Paris,”
where the Dominicans would send him.\textsuperscript{16} Even in later years, Thomas seems to have held to the Aristotelian formation he received there, especially from the Master Peter of Ireland, who, Torrell notes, was “completely up to date” on fine points of scholarship, such as the distinctions between Averroes and Aristotle.\textsuperscript{17}

The Emperor who was patron to the Aristotelian studium at Naples also took a personal interest in the young Thomas Aquinas. The story is well known in which Thomas ran away from Naples with the Dominicans, but was captured and imprisoned by his family; Torrell notes the detail that the party who captured him included not only “his own brother, who was still a faithful follower of Frederick II,” but also “Pier della Vigne, the all-powerful counselor to the emperor. The latter’s presence allows us to suppose that Frederick II had agreed to this operation, just as the sources say.”\textsuperscript{18} In fact, the Dominicans responded by asking the Pope to intervene with the Emperor personally over this young man. Perhaps all this helps explain why Thomas would later be offered the archbishopric of Naples.\textsuperscript{19}

The Fleming William of Moerbeke, “one of the most eminent and most productive of the translators from Greek into Latin,” especially of Aristotle, left northern Europe behind to spend his career between Greece and Italy.\textsuperscript{20} Beyond pointing out that William was most useful to Thomas when Thomas was in Italy, we may also note the opposite direction of their movement, as Thomas fled north. If he wanted to study Aristotle, he might have done better to stay under the Emperor at Naples.

Instead, Thomas chose the path of greatest resistance. His powerful family supported his study by sending him to Naples, but kidnapped him when he joined the Dominicans. He might have done better to accept his parents’ patronage. Instead of Naples, the Dominicans would send Thomas to the exalted University of Paris. But membership in that order caused considerable problems, so that Thomas had to step away from his philosophical studies during those critical years in Paris, for example, to write polemical works such as Contra impugnantes, De perfectione spiritualis vitae, and Contra doctrinam
retrahentium a religione. And while other students of Aristotle such as Siger of Brabant stayed put in Paris, the Dominicans left Thomas only two four-year terms as a master at the great university, ordering him to spend many of his prime scholarly years following the Papal court at Orvieto, building a studium at Rome, and teaching friars in Naples. Siger was an Augustinian canon, as were the Victorines a century before; if Thomas just wanted to study Aristotle in Paris, perhaps that vocation, too, might have been a better course.

His Dominican Vocation: Obstacles to Reading Aristotle
Torrell concludes his chapter on Thomas’s “Eventful Youth”: “Thomas surely perceived very quickly that his inclination toward study would be better satisfied in the new order”: in the Dominicans, rather than the service of the Emperor in southern Italy. But unless we strongly distinguish what kind of studies, all the evidence Torrell offers seems to contradict this claim.

After Albert and Thomas, we may take for granted that the Dominican Order was in favor of studying Aristotle. But this simply begs the question of why such giants of the study of Aristotle joined the Dominicans in the first place. St. Albert is said to have begun his intellectual life pondering his father’s falcons. His intellectual career included a De vegetabilibus that made enormous advances in the understanding of vines, buds, phototropism, sap, and the classification of plants, and a De animalibus that describes, sometimes for the first time, “113 kinds of quadrupeds, 114 birds, 139 aquatic animals, 61 serpents, and 49 worms... Albert can be ranked as one of the founders of animal anatomy and psychology.” It is strange to think of such a man joining an Order the Constitutions of which specifically direct the Novice Master to “teach them how to act in all places and under all circumstances... that they should not let their gaze wander,” and then lists the same again, among a list of forty faults for which one should receive the discipline: “If anyone shall let his eyes often wander on trifles, as he goes along the road or passes through a village.”
Thomas was more given to books than to observation. Torrell writes:

The ancient biographers themselves testified to this attitude toward sources as one of Thomas’s major character traits. This is the clearest meaning of the famous anecdote in which Thomas would much prefer to have the commentary of Chrysostom on Matthew than to possess the entire city of Paris. The same intellectual curiosity appears when Tocco says that Thomas “was going from one priory to another, reading the works of the different Fathers, and learning by heart a great part of the commentaries, which he later transcribed.”

Yet the same Constitutions of the Order of Preachers lists “to read books that are forbidden” as a “lighter fault” and “to ride horseback”—as, for example, to those many priories and abbeys where sources might be found—as one of thirteen grave faults (for which one would have to fast on bread and water for three days). Although those Constitutions specifically require a Master of Studies, they specify that friars may study nothing without his permission, and particularly admonish him to watch over the kinds of books the brothers read: “only theological books.”

Though the Dominicans were committed to study, they seem to target precisely the intellectual curiosity that drove Albert and Thomas to study Aristotle. We are not surprised then to hear Albert cry out, in his commentary on Dionysius (perhaps with Thomas himself as his secretary), “They are ignorant men who at all costs want to combat the use of philosophy—especially among the Preachers, where no one resists them.”

In 1259, a decade and a half after Thomas made the decision to join the Order, a team of five, including Albert and Thomas, would draft a plan of studies, including the study of Aristotle, that would be embraced by the general chapter. But that was the Dominican plan of studies after they changed it. Aristotle was not the teacher of the Order they joined.
Dominican Study according to the Constitutions of the Order

Rather, Thomas and Albert joined the party of biblical preachers. The primitive Constitutions of the Order of Preachers famously emphasize the power of dispensation: immediately in the Prologue they state, “The prelate shall have power to dispense the brethren in his priory when it shall seem expedient to him, especially in those things which are seen to impede study, preaching, or the good of souls.” The power of dispensation underlines the Dominican focus on the end: the rule is to support, not to stand in the way of, the mission of the Order of Preachers.

This paragraph on dispensation, however, nicely orders the reasons for dispensation. First it says dispensation is given “especially in those things which are seen to impede study, preaching, or the good of souls.” But the next clause drops the first item: “since it is known that our Order was founded, from the beginning, especially for preaching and the salvation of souls.” The final clause again drops the first item, pushing toward the true end: “Our study ought to tend principally, ardently, and with the highest endeavor to the end that we might be useful to the souls of our neighbors.” Preaching is for the good of souls. Study is for the good of preaching (and, perhaps, for hearing confessions—for the good of souls). The Customs support that good; when they do not support that good, they are to be dispensed. But so too, preaching is to be set aside when it does not serve the good of souls, or study when it does not support preaching. The focus is squarely on the end.

As such when the Customs come to the Master of Students, and thus the ordering of studies, the end is again clearly in sight. “Because diligent safeguards must be applied with respect to students”—to keep them ordered to their end—“they shall have a special brother, without whose permission” they can do nothing academic. The primary instruction given to this Master of Students is, “They shall not study the books of pagans and philosophers, even for an hour. . . . But everyone, both the young and others, shall read only theological
books.” Even to study the liberal arts requires special permission, not from the Master of Studies, but from the Master of the Order. “Each province is obliged to provide brethren destined for study with at least three books of theology.” But “those so assigned shall mainly study and concentrate on Church History, the Sentences [of Peter Lombard], the Sacred Text, and glosses from [of Patristic commentaries on Scripture].” In the Constitutions, the Dominicans are ordered to study, to be sure—but only the sacred studies that support the mission of preaching.

Study according to the Master of the Order

Thomas joined the Dominicans in 1245. He seems to have spent the years 1245–48 in Paris before spending some years in Cologne. From 1252–59 he was again in Paris, where he became a Master of Theology. Humbert of Romans was provincial of France from 1244–54, then became Master of the Order until 1263. It was thus largely under Humbert that Thomas received his Dominican formation.

Humbert further explains the role of studies in his Treatise on Preaching, an instruction from the Master to the Order of Preachers on their defining task. He begins by commending Holy Scripture, because “all its words come from God, speak of God and lead to God.” Thus “it is precisely from these words and not from those taken from other sciences that all good preaching ought principally to come.”

Humbert commends “full application to the study of whatever is needed for the proper execution of his office.” But his example is from St. Jerome’s exposition of Ezekiel 3:1, “Eat this book”: the preacher must fully apply himself to Scripture. This serious study requires, on the one hand, that one “consult the interpretations of the Sacred Scriptures made by the Saints”; one must “take great care to study what others have taught about the Scriptures.” On the other hand, one must beware of “too many subtleties,” especially when one produces “arguments drawn from philosophy” or “arguments irrelevant to their subject.”
Humbert commends, too, “After the study of the Holy Books . . . the study of creatures, for the Creator has placed in these many profound lessons.” But as an example of such study he presents not Aristotle, not Albert, not even Augustine, but “St. Anthony, the hermit,” a man without education or books.42

Because the preacher is often asked for counsel, he also must “study carefully the teaching of the learned.” But again his examples steer one elsewhere than philosophy: “especially in matters of restitution, simony, ecclesiastical censures, irregularities and dispensation from them, vows, marriages, promises and oaths.”43

But always focused on the end, Humbert warns that even the “study of holy writings” is of no use if it “has not preaching for its end.” Here he admits that “the profane sciences” can be useful, even mentioning apparently Aristotelian “lectures on physics, ethics, logic, and so forth.” But he immediately shifts: “far more profitable still are the arguments which Holy Scripture furnishes for every question.” Thus even for the student of nature, “anyone preparing to preach” should “seek the first causes of things in the sacred Books.” He should also spend much time in prayer.44

To be sure, Humbert recommends study: but always study in the support of preaching, which usually means the study of Scripture.

Study according to Thomas’s Predecessors in the Order

We are not surprised then to learn that the early Dominicans studied precisely these things. Hugh of St. Cher, the second Dominican master in Paris, compiled Postillae in totam Bibliam: like the Glossa Ordinaria from the previous century, a Patristic commentary on all of Scripture.45 Under him was begun “the Concordance of St. Jacques, as it was called from the title of the Paris priory . . . a model for all subsequent concordances.”46 And under him too, “Dominicans originated biblical correctoria—lists of corrections and alternate readings for the Vulgate version of the Bible.”47

Many other Dominicans wrote confessional manuals, focused,
as Humbert suggested, on more specifically pastoral topics.\textsuperscript{48} It is well known that for the first few centuries even Thomas’s \textit{Summa} was broken up; Dominicans mostly only wanted the part that was relevant to hearing confessions. Well into the fifteenth century, St. Antoninus, bishop of Florence from 1446–59, was writing a \textit{Specchio di coscienza}, a manual on morals for the laity; a \textit{Medicina dell’anima} instructing confessors on the commandments; an \textit{Interrogatio sopra la confessione} as a wider guide to confessors; \textit{Conclusiones et decisiones} and then \textit{Decisiones breves} to deal with particularly difficult cases; and at last a \textit{Summa moralis}.\textsuperscript{49}

Finally there was Raymond of Penyafort, who compiled the \textit{Decretals} of canon law of Hugolino-Gregory IX (pope from 1227–41), helping Dominicans deal with both Gregory’s work and Gratian’s \textit{Decretals}, both important to their ministry.\textsuperscript{50} He too wrote a \textit{Summa: Summa de casibus penitentiae}, to guide confessors.\textsuperscript{51} In all of this, Dominicans were hard at work, but in studies directly applicable to the mission of preaching.

When Torrell writes, “Thomas surely perceived very quickly that his inclination toward study would be better satisfied in the new order,” we might reply, \textit{sic et non}. Yes, before Thomas and Albert, Dominicans were studying hard. But precisely that hard work would seem an obstacle to the devoted student of Aristotle. The early Dominicans were too busy studying topics essential to their ministry to waste time on pagan philosophers.

It is surprising, then, that Albert and Thomas would have joined such an order. But it is surprising, too, that they were able so to influence that order. In 1259, it was precisely they who were appointed to a committee of five who would determine the curriculum for provincial houses of study—where the Order would train men not destined for the university but to teach in local houses. The curriculum Albert’s and Thomas’s committee proposed, and that the General Chapter accepted, included a large selection from Aristotle: not only \textit{De anima}, the \textit{Metaphysics}, \textit{De causis}, and the \textit{Physics}, but even the three-part \textit{De animalibus}, “On Plants,” and, indeed, the \textit{Meteorology}.\textsuperscript{52}
Torrrell concludes his study of Thomas’s vocation with a striking formulation by Marie-Dominique Chenu. “We must add a point rarely seen in the list of possible motives” for Thomas’s Dominican vocation, says Torrell: “Thomas’s desire to live a life of poverty. This has been strikingly formulated: ‘The refusal of Monte Cassino is, for Thomas, the same gesture made by Francis of Assisi.’”

Indeed, we learn from Hinnebusch’s History of the Dominicans that the Franciscans’ Cardinal-protector Hugolino said the Dominicans equaled the Franciscans in poverty.

We may add that Thomas not only embraced a physical poverty like that of the Franciscans, but also a kind of intellectual poverty. And as Francis rediscovered the goodness of the physical world only through his physical poverty, so Thomas rediscovered philosophy only through the teaching of Sacred Scripture.

Part Two: The Apostle

With Friar Thomas, then, let us rediscover the significance of philosophy through a study of Sacred Scripture. We do well to begin with St. Paul’s letter to the Romans, and Thomas’s magnificent commentary on it.

Romans

Romans, says Thomas, is Paul’s letter about grace: not in any specific respect, but in itself, as it is in the Church. The principal theme is the power of evangelical grace. The first part shows the necessity of grace: chapter 1 (vv. 18–end) shows the necessity of grace for the gentiles; chapters 2–4 its necessity for the Jews. The second part of the letter (chaps. 5–11) shows that the grace of Christ is efficacious and sufficient. The third part (12–16) shows the working out of this power in the moral life of the Christian. We need only consider the first part to see the role of Aristotle in Thomas’s reading of the Apostle.

After the greeting, Paul presents his argument in verses 16–17: “The Gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who
believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’” Romans is about the grace, the power of God for righteousness, to which we have access through faith in Christ.

But to describe the necessity of that grace, Paul speaks about what happens in its absence: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness (impietatem) and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth” (1:18). “Wrath,” says Thomas, means punishment (which comes from wrath in our ordinary experience). What brings about punishment is untruth, which Paul defines as ungodliness and unrighteousness. The rest of chapter one will consider these two kinds of untruth.\(^57\)

The Truth about God
Paul’s teaching on “impietatem” is familiar to Thomists precisely for its positive statements about reason’s ability to know the truth about God; it is cited at least ten times in the Summa theologiae. “For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made” (Rom 1:19–20).

In the Summa, Thomas cites this text as his authority for embarking on the Five Ways—and immediately adds that these things are “preambles to the articles of faith, for in this way faith” (the righteous shall live by faith) “presupposes natural knowledge, as grace does nature, and as perfection presupposes something that can be perfected.”\(^58\)

In fact, Paul’s text treats this natural knowledge as more “perfectible” than “perfected,” immediately going on to say, “although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened” (1:21). The wisdom of Aristotle is part of the argument about ungodliness and the necessity of grace. Yet it is striking that Paul
describes the obligations incumbent on this natural knowledge as distinctly Christian obligations: to “honor him as God or give thanks to him.” They “worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen” (1:25). Their natural knowledge is just the knowledge that leads the Christian to worship.  

The Truth about Man

After “ungodliness,” Paul speaks of “unrighteousness”: “they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. . . . Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity” (1:23, 25).

There follows a two-part discussion of sin. First Paul discusses sexual sin, then he gives a catalogue of other sins. In this latter section, says Thomas, “First he names sin in general, saying, ‘filled with all iniquity.’ . . . Then, when he says ‘malice,’ he enumerates sins specifically”—first active ones, then sins of omissions; sins of bodily delights, sins of the appetite for exterior things, sins that hurt one’s neighbor, and so on: an all-inclusive list.

Paul introduces this list, however, with his well-known treatment of sexual sin. “For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature (contra naturam); and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another” (1:26–27). Perhaps most interesting in this passage is the introduction of the word “nature”—again, in a negation: contra naturam.

Thomas comments, “It should be considered that something can be contrary to man’s nature in two ways. In one way, it is contra naturam of man’s constitutive difference, which is to be rational; in this sense every sin is said to be against man’s nature, inasmuch as it is against right reason.” John Damascene, in fact, says that the angels sin against their nature. “But in another way, contra naturam can be said with reference to man’s genus, which is animal.” Sexual sin, in Thomas’s understanding, illustrates this category: we can vividly illustrate how all sin is unnatural by seeing how sexual sin goes against our animal nature.
“Natural” Knowledge

Thomas uses the word “natural” as a key to Paul’s whole argument. Paul says, “since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done” (Rom 1:28). Thomas makes the connection to “nature”: “it was right that those who did injury to God’s nature, that is, what is proper to him, by attributing it to creatures, should be depraved in their own nature.”

Their natural knowledge of God did not lead to the natural giving of thanks, but to the ascription of God’s nature to other things; thus they suffer in their own nature, both generically animal (for example, by sexual sin) and specifically human (by all sins). Paul’s words contra naturam give Thomas a key to tie together the entire argument.

But so too they raise the question of nature. What is natural? What knowledge of God is natural? What is man’s nature? What is fitting to that nature, both animal and rational? It is remarkable, and remarkably central to Paul’s argument, that the Apostle does not tell us. To the contrary, his point is precisely that we ought to know. Indeed, he concludes the chapter by saying that “they” know: “They know God’s righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, but they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them” (1:32).

Here, natural knowledge is no way to salvation. Rather, it is precisely Paul’s way of condemnation, in the pivotal first chapter of Romans. Natural knowledge, of God and man, is what we ought to fulfill but do not. In his initial description of the argument, Thomas says that Paul “shows the power of evangelical grace to be necessary for the salvation of the gentiles, because the wisdom in which they take comfort cannot save them”. Therefore they have no excuse” (2:1). Aristotle is no substitute for the Gospel.

Natural Law

But he is a handmaid to it, insofar as he shows what “they know”: indeed, what we are supposed to know, and live by. In fact, Paul’s argument concludes with another use of the word “nature,” in Romans
2:14: “For when gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law.”

Commenting on Thomas’s commentary on this passage, Robert Wilken shows Thomas’s Augustinian, anti-Pelagian reading of the text. One might be tempted (as Origen was) to understand that the gentiles who were condemned in chapter 1 are now being commended, as if Romans 2:14 spoke of “pagan righteousness.” “They know” what they should do, and some of them do it.

But, after Augustine, this reading is unacceptable. Commenting on the text, Thomas says, “when he says ‘by nature,’ a question is raised. For he seems to be taking the part of the Pelagians, who say that man by his own natural powers can keep all the precepts of the law.” But this is against the entire argument of Romans; Paul’s point is precisely the necessity of grace: “the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith’” (Rom 1:16–17). Salvation is by faith, not through pagan knowledge.

To the contrary, Thomas says,

He is speaking of gentiles who have come to faith, who by the help of the grace of Christ have begun to keep the moral precepts of the law. Or he might say, “naturally,” meaning that the law of nature shows them what ought to be done. . . . Nonetheless, grace is necessary to move the affect—just as through the law there is knowledge of sin, as he says below [Romans 3:20], and nonetheless grace is necessary to move the affect.

In Thomas’s reading of Romans, natural law is not the path of pagan righteousness. In fact, it is more important than that: it is the path of Christian righteousness. Natural law—what we know “naturally,” what indeed “they know,” so that “they have no excuse”—is precisely the image of God within us, restored by grace.

When the psalmist says, as if to someone seeking what the works
of justice are, “sacrifice a sacrifice of justice,” he adds, “many say, who will show us good things?” Responding to this question, the psalmist says, “the light of your face, oh Lord, is impressed upon us.” It is as if the light of natural reason, by which we discern what is good or bad, which pertains to the natural law, was nothing other than the impression of the divine light in us.68

The Role of Aristotle
But again, this does not make Aristotle irrelevant; it makes him fascinating. What do “they know”? What ought we to know? Paul’s entire proclamation of evangelical grace in Romans is predicated on natural knowledge: of God, of ourselves, of how we ought to live. It is grace that makes nature interesting, grace that restores and perfects precisely nature. And it is preaching that makes the articulation of this theme especially important.

Servais Pinckaers summarizes this dynamic in Thomas’s moral theology, making reference to other passages of the New Testament. “As for Aristotle’s Ethics, so widely used by St. Thomas,” says Pinckaers, he intended to place it at the service of Gospel morality, which he interpreted as a theologian. In so doing he was following the tradition of St. Paul himself, who wrote in his Letter to the Philippians, “Fill your minds with everything that is true, everything that is noble, everything that is good and pure, everything that we love and honor, and everything that can be thought virtuous or worthy of praise” (4:8). He was also within the tradition of the Greek and Latin Fathers, notably St. Augustine, when they included in their works the virtues and wisdom of the Greeks in the service of the Gospel.69

Paul does not tell us what is noble, good, and pure. Grace does not create nature. Rather Paul calls us to live out what we know by nature.

And the preacher is called to articulate this knowledge. “St. Thomas,” says Pinckaers, “undertook to demonstrate as far as pos-
sible to both Christians and pagans the Gospel’s higher harmony with reason, whose best interpreter, in his view, was Aristotle. He gave a reason for his evangelical hope to all who asked, in accordance with St. Peter’s urging (1 Peter 3:15).”

In the end, Aristotle’s philosophy helps guarantee the true humanity of Christian moral theology: “The Angelic Doctor wanted moral teaching to be both Christian and human, each dimension supporting the other. Now we think we have to choose between a Christian and a human morality, between the natural and the supernatural.”

**Natural Knowledge Elsewhere in Thomas’s Theology**

We can watch a parallel deployment of Aristotle in sacramental theology. Consider Colman O’Neill’s magnificent little essay on “The Language of Sacramental Realism,” section 6.4 of *Sacramental Realism: A General Theory of the Sacraments*. “St. Thomas found the word ‘substance’ in Aristotle,” says O’Neill, “and was concerned, for his own reasons, to suggest that Aristotle attached to it the same existential meaning as did St. Thomas himself.” But in the context of Eucharistic theology, “It would be tempting to say that the word makes no appeal to any philosophy, that it simply reflects the judgment that this is no longer bread but Christ himself.”

Similarly, to describe “the active presence of Christ claimed for baptism,” Thomas adopted Aristotle’s concept of instrumental causality. . . . The more mystical view of divine energy being mediated to man through the humanity of Christ and through the sacramental rites could be formulated with greater conceptual precision by saying that the divine Trinity, the source of all created good, acts as the principal cause of whatever effects are attributed to the sacrament, and uses as its instruments, first the humanity of Christ, united to the Son, and then the elements of the liturgical symbol.

Finally, “the category of efficient cause was adopted by Aquinas to express the creative activity of the Blessed Trinity.” On the one
hand, that “these categories” of causality “were originally elaborated by Plato or Aristotle is of slight importance.” Indeed, using ideas of causality derived from within the world is almost “embarrassing” for the theologian—“Or, at least, they should be embarrassed if they have grasped the fact that the effect of God’s creative activity is existence, the being-real of anything that is real.” Nonetheless, “the only way out of negative theology that has ever been discovered, the only way there is to say something positive about God and about his creative and saving activity, however imperfect the concept must be acknowledged to be, relies in the last analysis on the conviction that it is legitimate and helpful to speak of the act of creation as an exercise of efficient causality.” Ultimately, it is not all that different “from the quite natural affirmation of the believer that God made the world.” Note the word “natural.”

In short, according to O’Neill, although Thomas makes abundant use of Aristotelian metaphysics in his theology of the sacraments, Thomas’s sacramental theology is not for that reason Aristotelian. He is merely deploying Aristotle as a means of stating clearly the Church’s affirmations of biblical faith in the real power of Christ in the sacraments. This insight need only be put side by side with O’Neill’s equally magnificent presentations of Johannine theology (“Christ as archetypal sacrament”) and Pauline theology (“The mystery of Christ”), earlier in the same book, to see that here again, for Thomas, Aristotle is the servant of Scripture. But equally importantly, Aristotle helps Thomas articulate “natural” arguments: not obscure philosophical theories, but human statements about reality.

Ralph McInerny jests about a modern “identity thesis, that is, that Thomas was Aristotle.” But in the eyes of his contemporaries, Thomas’s greater identity was with St. Paul. Robert Wilken tells the story:

It was said that one day when Thomas was seated in his chair commenting on the epistle [to the Romans], the Apostle himself walked into the room. Thomas asked St. Paul whether
he was expounding the text according to what the Apostle had intended. Saint Paul said that Thomas was explaining his words insofar as they could be understood in this life, but a time would come when he could understand them fully. Then the Apostle grabbed Thomas’s cape, dragged him out of the room, and took him away. Three days later news of Thomas’s death reached Naples.\textsuperscript{79}

If Thomas read Aristotle, it was only so he could better understand and teach—or in the words of the \textit{Constitutions}, study and preach—the truth of the Gospel, for the good of human souls.

\textit{Part Three: The Philosopher and the Christian}

“Scholarly opinion is divided,” says John Wippel, “concerning Thomas’s reasons for writing the Aristotelian commentaries.”\textsuperscript{80} Torrell cites various possibilities: 1) Thomas might be holding his personal opinion in reserve, working toward an objective statement of Aristotle’s position; 2) Thomas might be giving his own opinion, “rectifying and amplifying Aristotle”; 3) Or he might be doing different things at different times, so that the careful investigator must check each statement in the commentaries against Thomas’s statements elsewhere.\textsuperscript{81} Wippel’s \textit{The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas} is surely one of the masterpieces of carefully weighing each statement to determine whether it is Thomas’s opinion or his citation of someone else. Wippel gives an even subtler read of the second position: “Torrell emphasizes the point that in writing them Thomas wishes to determine the mind of Aristotle in the texts on which he comments, but that this desire to discover what Aristotle ‘wished to say’ at times leads Thomas to go beyond the texts themselves in his search for the truth.”\textsuperscript{82}

Wippel gives the limit positions: “Some twentieth-century interpreters seem to assume that almost any statement made by Thomas in these works should be taken as an expression of his personal thought. Gilson, at the other extreme, would reduce them to mere
exercises in and contributions to the history of philosophy. The truth seems to fall somewhere in between.\footnote{36}

Our survey here provides a complement to Wippel’s “historical” approach. But whereas in Wippel’s book, “history” means focusing exclusively on the texts themselves, our “history” has attempted to look at the context, the greater purposes of Thomas’s intellectual vocation.

Our reading of the Apostle Paul suggests that Thomas was looking for true pagan wisdom, for what “they know.” Paul’s insistence on nature and natural knowledge raises the question, especially for the biblical preacher, of what reason itself does find. According to Thomas’s reading of Romans 2:14, the Christian “naturally” knows the truths of nature, naturally knows “everything that is true, everything that is noble, everything that is good and pure, everything that we love and honor, and everything that can be thought virtuous or worthy of praise” (Phil 4:8). But the preacher, called to articulate this message, wants to determine what natural reason can actually say.

The Christian’s supposedly “natural” knowledge becomes even, to some extent, a hindrance. At the beginning of this article, we cited van Steenberghen: “Medieval philosophy has nearly always suffered from its too close contact with theology. . . . Today still, many Catholic philosophers, deformed by theology, do not succeed in imposing on themselves a strictly philosophical method. . . . We suffer much more from the confusion of philosophy and theology than from their isolation.”\footnote{84}

Thomas might make a distinction. The ordinary Christian does not suffer from the \textit{instinctus} of faith. But the articulation of the message might suffer precisely from the ease—the naturalness—with which the Christian comes to the right answers. The Christian’s “natural” knowledge of the truth about marriage, for example, might encourage him to make facile arguments: anyway, the conclusion is clear to him. Insofar as the Christian’s affect is less than fully purified, such bad arguments might lead him to wrong conclusions in more difficult topics. Insofar as the Christian is called to preach, he must especially look for clarity.
Aristotle, perhaps, provides Thomas with a control. Just as Wippel checks Thomas’s commentaries against his statements elsewhere, so Thomas checks his arguments against what a real live pagan philosopher actually says. When tempted to say that an argument pertains to reason alone, he checks his answers against what Aristotle said. When tempted to make an argument that would please philosophers, he asks an actual non-Christian philosopher.

**Philosophy at the Service of Theology**

That Thomas was concerned with such arguments is apparent from the structure of his works. *Summa contra gentiles* strongly distinguishes between what could, at least in theory, be known by reason alone (Books I–III) and what can only be known by faith (Book IV). He is well aware that most philosophers will fail—because only few have the ability, and even they can find the truth only after a long time, and with the admixture of many errors—and though he checks his own work every step of the way with Scripture, he is insistent on finding rational arguments that actually work. What better way to test that than by checking whether they make sense to Aristotle? It is as if, just as he was said to ask Paul about his interpretation of Scripture, he also asks Aristotle about the natural reasonability of his arguments. Does it actually make sense to a pagan philosopher?

And though the *Summa theologiae* gives up *Summa contra gentiles*’s discipline of saving faith till the end, it still follows the same principle throughout. Philosophy demonstrates about the one God (*ST* I, qq. 2–26) before faith considers the Triune God (qq. 27–43). Creation is considered philosophically (qq. 44–61) before faith considers the fall of the angels and the biblical account of the six days (qq. 62–74). The nature of man is examined, with a close reading of *De anima* (qq. 75–82), before faith considers Adam and Eve (qq. 83–102). And God’s governance of nature is considered philosophically (I, qq. 103–119) before the entire secunda pars considers *Imago Dei*’s participation in that governance.

In the *prima secundae*, Thomas establishes the requirements of
man’s nature (qq. 1–4) before considering the divine attainment of beatitude (q. 5). Many questions consider the nature of human action and habitus philosophically (qq. 6–67) before three consider his perfection by the gifts of the Spirit in Isaiah 11, the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount, and the Fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5 (qq. 68–70). Sin is examined philosophically (qq. 71–78) before faith asks questions about the devil, the Fall, and mortal sin (qq. 79–89). Law is examined philosophically (qq. 90–97) to lay the ground for an examination of the laws of the Old and New Testaments (qq. 98–108). And even grace is considered first as a natural necessity, even if it were not available (qq. 109–14) before Thomas considers our access thereto by faith (II-II, if it may all be considered as speaking of infused virtue, and III).

The Theological Telos

Certainly much of our attention focuses, as indeed do most of the pages of prima secundae, on what are here presented as philosophical questions. Pinckaers says the questions on the New Law of the Gospel, 106–08, were “never a success in the schools” (though we may question whether Cajetan’s advice to memorize these questions is a dismissal or commendation). But as Pinckaers says, “it is no cause for surprise to find that the Blessed Sacrament is located in only one place in a cathedral: we know that It radiates throughout the whole edifice.”

So too, he argues, the short treatise on the evangelical Law is the “high point of St. Thomas’s moral theology” and the “cornerstone of theology.” Everything else culminates in the Gospel. It is the culmination of the questions on Law (qq. 90–105): exactly parallel to Romans, the natural law (q. 94) forms the basis for understanding the Old Law (qq. 98–105), which is perfected by the “New Law” (qq. 106–08), “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus,” which “has made me free from the law of sin and death” (Rom 8:2); the law “written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not on tablets of stone, but on fleshy tablets of the heart” (2 Cor 3:3). As
a “law,” an “exterior principle of action,” (ST I-II, q. 90, prologue) the New Law helps us to overcome the problem of sin (qq. 71–89). But it is a law *indita*, written on the heart, and so properly a fulfillment of the questions on human action (qq. 6–21), passion (qq. 22–48), and habitus (qq. 49–70). Pinckaers writes, “The evangelical Law is the grace ‘of the Holy Spirit.’ Here we are referred to the study of the Holy Spirit as love and as gift in the heart of the Trinity, in the first part (qq. 37 and 38), and then to the study of the gifts, Beatitudes, and fruits of the Holy Spirit in the *prima secunda* (qq. 68–70), and to the association of gifts with virtues throughout the *secunda secundae*.” The New Law is the “instinctus” that reaches its first summit in the question on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit.

In the *prima secundae*, many questions lead up to and set the stage for understanding the properly biblical ideas of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit and the New Law. Indeed, just as in *Summa contra gentiles*, most of the pages are the philosophical preliminaries for understanding these Gospel truths. Yet it is for the sake of the Gospel that the philosophical work is done. Philosophy is only a subordinate part of Thomas’s theological project. Yet it must be true philosophy that plays that part.

Thus throughout the *Summa theologiae*, Thomas makes reference to “the Philosopher.” What does the Philosopher think? What, in the words of Romans, do “they know”? What is the natural truth discovered by natural reason? Aristotle is not the master, but he is an important servant in the elucidation of biblical truth.

**Conclusions**

What, then, was Thomas’s purpose when he read Aristotle? Ironically, the data examined here suggest that precisely because his ultimate end was theological, his proximate end in reading Aristotle was to determine what Aristotle actually said.

We may consider analogies to two of Thomas’s immediate predecessors. St. Francis of Assisi believed that all of Creation speaks of the
Divine Father. But this is no reason to overlook nature; it is reason, to the contrary, to examine it more closely. As if Francis’s intellectual counterpart, Thomas believed that natural reason is part of the life of faith, and thus he wanted to know what natural reason really says. For Thomas’s evangelical purposes, it is important that the Philosopher be a real philosopher.

Indeed, St. Thomas’s teacher St. Albert was himself like an intellectual St. Francis, himself a real philosopher and real naturalist, of the highest order. But as we saw above, where Albert often sought knowledge through his own senses, Thomas was above all a lover of books. Thomas wanted to know not just how things appeared to his senses, but how they appeared to others, whether it was checking his own reading of the Gospel against Chrysostom’s or checking his own reading of natural reason against Aristotle’s.

Thus for Thomas Aquinas, it is important that “the Philosopher” he cites be a real philosopher, a real pagan wise man. He wanted to know not just what meteorology looks like to a Christian philosopher, but what it looked like to Aristotle.

Notes


2. For example, it was discussed at the 1931 meeting of the Société française de philosophie, the 1932 meeting of the Société d’Etudes Philosophiques, and culminating in the 1933 meeting of the Société Thomiste. The discussion included monumental scholars of Thomas Aquinas including Étienne Gilson, Jacques Maritain, Émile Brehier, Fernand van Steenenberghen, Pierre Mandonnet, Antonin-Gilbert Sertillanges, and Maurice Blondel.
4. Ibid., 238.
5. Consider, for example, the convolutions of the following statement, by Sertillanges: “I conclude from this that Mr. Maritain’s formula, qualifying Christian philosophy as philosophy simpliciter living historically in a Christian regime, and enjoying thereby the objective and subjective reinforcements supplied by faith, is a perfect and luminously comprehensive formula, but only under the condition, first, that it does not amputate from philosophy simpliciter the beginnings with which the ‘naturally Christian soul’ provides it” (Sadler, 233).
6. Réné Gauthier discusses the relation between Thomas’s commentary on De Anima and his writing of prima pars, qq. 75–89, in the introduction to Sentencia libri De anima (Rome: Leonine, 1984), vol. 45/1, 288*–94*. Thomas describes the Meteorology in its prologue: “Because in the book De generatione Aristotle determined about changes of the elements in general, it was necessary for the completion of natural science to determine about the species of changes which happen in the elements; and he determines about these in this book, which is entitled Meteorologicorum,” Super meteora, lib. 1, c. 1, n. 2 (Rome: Leonine, 1886). He describes De generatione: “After considering change and changeable things in general, which was done in the Book of the Physics, first one must consider what is said about bodies inasmuch as they can change with regard to place, in the book De caelo; this is the second part of natural science. There remains the consideration of other kinds of change, which are not common to all bodies, but only to lower ones. Among these in the first place is Generatio et corruptio.” In De generatione, prologue, 1 (Rome: Leonine, 1886).
8. Ibid., 240.
10. Torrell, 295.
11. Ibid., 289–95.
13. Torrell, 5; 4, 6, and 9; 4.
15. Frederick II died in 1250. But Charles of Anjou (1227–85), who took the Pope’s side in his ongoing battles, made Naples his seat and continued to work to make it the most eminent university in Christendom (see Torrell, 249).
17. Ibid., 8; 7–8. Averroism was a central problem in the Parisian reading of Aristotle (see Torrell, 191–94).
18. Ibid., 10.
19. Ibid., 14.
20. Ibid., 174–75. Moerbeke was a Dominican, but as we shall argue below about Albert, it is not immediately obvious why any of these scholarly men joined the Dominicans; in any case, Thomas’s Dominican vocation did not send him with Moerbeke to Greece.

21. “It is necessary to grasp that Dominican policy briskly rotated the masters in and out of positions at Paris in order to form the greatest possible number and then to send them to teach elsewhere” (ibid., 98).

22. Ibid., 15.


25. “The Primitive Constitutions of the Order of Friars Preachers,” part 1, chap. 12, trans. Francis C. Lehner, in Saint Dominic: Biographical Documents, ed. Francis C. Lehner (Washington, DC: Thomist Press, 1964), 210–20. “The Primitive Constitutions” are also known as, and indeed call themselves, the “Book of Customs” (see “Primitive Constitutions,” prologue, in Lehner, 213). The Primitive Constitutions were completed in 1228, and subsequently modified slightly while Raymond of Penafort was Master of the Order, in 1238. The Primitive text of 1228 is now available only in what is known as the Rodez text. Raymond’s version remained in effect until the Second Vatican Council, and it is under this text that Thomas and Albert would have entered the Order. Lehner’s edition reproduces all variants from the Primitive text; what we here quote, then, are the Constitutions of the Order that Thomas and Albert joined. See Lehner, 209–11, and 258, n. 40. “Primitive Constitutions,” part 1, c. 20, n. 38, in Lehner, 227.

26. Torrell, 140. He continues, “We can easily identify some of the places where Thomas could have consulted documents: The Abbey of Monte Cassino.” Perhaps we can read in the contrast between the Commentary he wanted and the city of Paris in which he lived frustration with the resources available in that city.

27. “Primitive Constitutions,” part 1, c. 20, n. 21, in Lehner, 225 and 228.


29. Torrell 21–22. “Quidam qui nesciunt, omnibus modis volunt impugnare usum philosophiae, et maxime in Praedicatoribus, ubi nullus eis resistit, tanquam bruta animalia blasphemantes in iis quae ignorant.” Quoted in Hinnebusch, vol. 2, 34, n. 41. Hinnebusch says some interpret this to be an attack from outside the Preachers on the use of philosophy among the Preachers, but admits that the “facts support” attacks from within or without (Hinnebusch, vol. 2, 25). The “ubi” seems to indicate that the attacks come from within the Order.


32. For a striking illustration of this, see Early Dominicans: Selected Writings, ed. Simon Tugwell (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 456–65. It is well known that the Dominican Customs or Constitutions, which specify the more general Rule of St. Augustine, largely copy from the Customs of the reformed Canons of St. Norbert, the Praemonstratensians. By putting the two Constitutions side by side, however, Tugwell shows the radical difference between the monastic Norbertines, focused on obedience to the Rule, and the missionary Dominicans, for whom the rule is only a tool. The power of Dispensation is the first and immediate difference between the two. The second is the Dominican insistence that “our Constitutions do not bind us on pain of sin, but only on pain of a penance” (Prologue, 457). Hinnebusch highlights the difference in terms of Norbertine obedience to the Rule vs. Dominican obedience to a person (vol. 2, 130).

33. “Primitive Constitutions,” prologue, in Lehner, 212 (emphasis added).

34. “Primitive Constitutions,” part 2, c. 28, in Lehner, 245.

35. Ibid.


37. On Humbert, see Hinnebusch, 288–94.

38. Note the parallel in the seventh article of the ST: “All things in sacred doctrine are treated as they relate to [sub ratione] God: because they are God himself, or because they are ordered to God, as to their beginning and end. Whence it follows that God is truly the subject of this science.” St. Dominic himself was said only to speak of God and to God.


40. Treatise on Preaching, c. 1, 6, in Conlon, 23.

41. Ibid.

42. Treatise on Preaching, c. 2, 2, in Conlon, 30.

43. Ibid., c. 7, 13, in Conlon, 116.

44. Ibid., c. 4, 6, in Conlon, 64.


46. Ibid., 106.

47. Ibid., 104.

48. For a detailed discussion, see ibid., 238–45.

49. Ibid., 255–62.

50. Ibid., 246.

51. Ibid., 248–51.

52. Ibid., 27. Not surprisingly, the list overlaps considerably with the texts on which Thomas was writing commentaries. Hinnebusch lists the curriculum (see vol. 2, 27), and it includes Aristotle’s works the Physics, On animals (all three parts: De historia, De partibus, and De generatione animalium), De anima, De generatione, On sense and sensible things, On sleeping and waking, On plants, On memory and reminiscence, On death and life
(actually by Costa ben Luca), *On the difference of spirit and soul*, *On the heavens*, *On meteorology*, the *Metaphysics*, and *De causis* (actually by Proclus). Thomas commented on *On sense and sensible things*, *On memory and reminiscence*, and *De causis* during the latter period in Paris, and *De anima*, *De generatione*, *On the heavens*, the *Meteorology*, and the *Metaphysics* during the last short year in Naples. (See Torrell, 341–45.)

53. Torrell, 16.


55. “His whole doctrine is about the grace of Christ, which can however be considered in three respects. First, as it is in the head, that is, Christ; this is acclaimed in the letter to the Hebrews. In another way as it is in the principal members of the mystical body; it is acclaimed this way in the letters to prelates [First and Second Timothy, Titus, Philemon]. In a third way as it is in the mystical body itself, which is the Church; it is acclaimed this way in the letters to the gentiles. The distinction of these is thus: the grace of Christ can be considered in three ways: first, in itself, and thus it is acclaimed in the letter to the Romans.” (1 and 2 Corinthians and Galatians, he says, consider it in the sacraments; the rest consider its effect in building up the Church.) *Super Rom.* (Turin ed.: 1953), prologue.


57. *Super Rom.*, c. 1, lec. 6.

58. *ST* I, q. 2, a. 2, resp. and ad 1.

59. Thomas describes “honor him” as *debitum cultum*. “Give thanks to him” is in Paul’s Greek *eucharistésan*. Thomas will say, “Ultimately, the whole celebration of the Mass culminates in giving thanks, the people exulting for their reception of the mystery, which the chant after communion signifies, and the priest offering thanks through his prayer, just as Christ too, when he had celebrated the supper with his disciples, sang a hymn, as is said in Matthew 26” (*ST* III, q. 83, a. 4). But the medieval derivation of the word *Eucharist* had shifted from “giving thanks” to “good grace, because ‘the grace of God is eternal life,’ as is said in Romans 6, and because it really contains Christ, who is full of grace” (*ST* III, q. 73, a. 4). In his commentary on Romans 1:11, Thomas says, “they ought to have given thanks to him in all things (1 Thes 5:18), but they
did not, but rather ascribed all their good to their own genius and virtue.” In either interpretation of the Eucharist, giving thanks or receiving graces, Paul’s description of the failure of the gentiles is eucharistic.

60. “Full of all iniquity: malice, fornication, avarice; full of wrong-doing: envy, murder, contention, guile; ill-will: whispering, detractors—which is hateful to God—and contemptful; prideful: puffed-up, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without wisdom, incautious, without affection, without fellowship, without mercy” (Rom 1:29–31, translation based on Thomas’s commentary in Super Rom., c. 1, lec. 8).

61. Super Rom., c. 1, lec. 8. Thomas likes this argument enough to make it again in the article on lust in De malo:

The act of lust can be called contra naturam in two ways. First, absolutely, as it is contrary to the nature of every animal; and thus every act of lust apart from the intercourse of male and female is called contra naturam, inasmuch as it is not proportionate to generation, which in all kinds of animals comes from the intercourse of the two sexes; this is how the Gloss speaks [on Romans 1]. In another way, an act is called contra naturam because it is against the proper nature of man, to which it belongs to order the act of generation to its proper [debitam] upbringing; in this way, all fornication is contra naturam. (De malo, q. 15, a. 1, ad 7)

63. Ibid., lec. 6.
64. This passage ties together Paul’s discussion of the gentiles and that of the Jews. He argues that the Jewish law only underlines the “natural law” that the gentiles already knew—and thus further underlines the necessity of grace, for Jew and Greek alike.

66. Super Rom., c. 2, lec. 3.
67. Ibid.
68. ST I-II, q. 91, a. 2.
70. Ibid., 189.
71. Ibid.
73. Ibid., 155.
74. Ibid., 156.
75. Ibid., 159.
76. Ibid., 160.
77. Ibid., sections 3.1, 52–57, and 3.2, 57–61.
79. Wilken, 288.
82. Wippel, xx, n. 17.
83. Ibid., xx.
84. Sadler, 238.
85. See Book I, chapter 4, more concisely stated in the first article of Summa theologiae.
86. Pinckaers, 173. Similarly, Cajetan comments, "Questions sixty-nine [on the Beatitudes] and seventy [on the Fruits] demand frequent reading and constant meditation, not exposition," Summa theologiae Ia-IIae, q. 1–70 cum commentariis Caietani (Rome: Leonine, 1891), v. 6, 456.
87. Pinckaers, 169–70.
88. Ibid., 172, 177.
89. Thomas took his reading of these texts from Augustine’s De spiritu et littera (see ibid., 174–75), but developed them as no one before him had (ibid., 177).
90. Pinckaers, 177.